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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 COLOMBO 000780

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DEPARTMENT FOR SA, SA/INS, S/CT

NSC FOR E. MILLARD

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PTER](#) [PINS](#) [CE](#) [NO](#) [JA](#) [LTTE](#)

SUBJECT: In latest effort, Norwegian facilitators press case, but Tigers don't say yes to talks

Refs: Colombo 773, and previous

(U) Classified by Lewis Amselem, Deputy Chief of Mission. Reasons 1.5 (b, d)

1. (C) SUMMARY: Closely following up the visit of a senior Japanese envoy, Norwegian facilitator Erik Solheim met May 8 with Tiger leaders. The meeting was cordial, but the Tigers did not confirm that they will come back to the peace talks or attend the June donors conference. Norway's FM is expected to visit next week to press the case again. While an impressive display of diplomatic activity, the tag team efforts of the GoN and the GoJ have not forced the Tigers to buckle yet. END SUMMARY.

2. (U) In the latest of the increasingly frenetic tag team efforts to engage the Tigers, Norwegian special envoy Erik Solheim met with senior Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) leaders on May 8. (Note: Solheim's meeting closely follows that of Japanese envoy Yasushi Akashi, who met with LTTE leader V. Prabhakaran on May 7 -- see Reftel.) The meeting took place in the LTTE-controlled town of Kilinochchi in northern Sri Lanka. Present from the Tiger side were chief negotiator Anton Balasingham, Sea Tiger leader Soosai (one name only), and a number of other LTTE military leaders.

3. (C) Solheim's intervention did not break the deadlock over the peace process. Tomas Stangeland, polchief of the Norwegian Embassy, attended the meeting and told us late May 8 that Solheim pressed the Tigers hard to return to the peace talks and attend the June donors conference in Tokyo. The Tigers would not budge from their demand that the GSL had to earn LTTE trust by taking steps re delivery of humanitarian assistance and reducing military deployments in Jaffna District.

4. (C) Stangeland added that Solheim had pressed the Tigers hard on clear indications that LTTE operatives were engaged in a widespread campaign of assassination against Tamil opponents (see Reftels). The Tigers denied the charge.

5. (C) Despite the brush off on substantive issues, Stangeland characterized the meeting as quite cordial. He thought that it was significant that Balasingham had brought Soosai, a well-known LTTE hard-liner, to the meeting. (Note: The Sea Tigers, the unit Soosai heads, has been involved in several violent confrontations with the Sri Lankan Navy in recent months.) Stangeland thought this rare exposure of Soosai to international diplomacy might have a softening effect within LTTE inner circles in the long-term.

6. (U) Stangeland noted that Solheim had briefed Sri Lankan Prime Minister Wickremesinghe late May 8 about the meeting with the LTTE earlier in the day. In the meantime, the next step in engaging the Tigers seems to involve Norwegian Foreign Minister Jan Petersen, who is reportedly set to visit Sri Lanka next week. (Note: Petersen was to visit Sri Lanka earlier this year, but his visit had to be postponed because of the Iraq situation.) Petersen will reportedly meet with the Tigers in Kilinochchi.

7. (C) COMMENT: While an impressive display of diplomatic activity, the tag team efforts of the Norwegians and the Japanese have not forced the Tigers to buckle yet. With the Japanese-mandated deadline (May 14) of one-week slipping away, a decision by the Tigers about the June donors conference in Tokyo must be made soon. Our guess is that the inner circle of the Tigers will be huddling soon to discuss the group's future moves. END COMMENT.

8. (U) Minimize considered.

